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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet summarizes findings of a survey of Welsh-medium nursery education in Wales as of 1968. Information about premises, equipment, and activities was collected by means of questionnaires, interviews, and visits to sample schools. The survey covers voluntary Welsh-medium nursery schools, but local authority-maintained classes were included for comparative purposes. Growth of the movement is discussed, as well as problems of space and budget. The background of the teachers and students is also discussed. The primary motivation is seen to be the desire to preserve the Welsh language and culture, but interest and support was also found in non-Welsh homes. Based on an assessment of students' progress, it is concluded that the voluntary Welsh-medium nursery schools promote bilingualism without detriment to academic progress; that this movement is still primarily a middle-class movement; and that Welsh-medium nursery education should be incorporated into the state-supported system. (AM)

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CYFADRAN ADDYSG COLEG PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
ABERYSTWYTH

YSGOLION MEITHRIN CYMRAEG

Arolwg 1968 A Survey

WELSH-MEDIUM NURSERY SCHOOLS

Pamphlet No. 16

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF WALES
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FOREWORD

In 1961 the Faculty of Education of the University College of Wales published a pamphlet entitled "The Presentation of Welsh as a Second Language" advocating the presentation of Welsh to children from English-speaking homes at nursery and infant school stage. By to-day, local education authorities in Wales, almost without exception, have accepted the principle of presenting some Welsh as a second language to pupils from English-speaking homes before they reach the age of seven. The traditional policy of starting the second language in the junior school has been found wanting and abandoned.

In the meantime many voluntary Welsh nursery schools, *Ysgolion Meithrin Cymraeg*, have been established with the specific aim of developing competence in the Welsh language in their young pupils, irrespective of the mother tongue.

In January 1968, the Faculty appointed Mrs Felicity Roberts as a temporary research assistant to make a survey of these schools, their distribution, their methods, their difficulties and their measure of success. She collected the information summarised in this pamphlet. I wish to thank her for her services to the Faculty and also scores of teachers, committee members, and pupils who so readily supplied her with the information she needed before she could present a report on her work to the Faculty.

This pamphlet contains a summary in English of a fuller report in Welsh which will be published in book form by Llyfrau'r Dryw, Llandybie, Carmarthenshire, early in 1969.

JAC L. WILLIAMS,
Dean of the Faculty of Education.

University College of Wales,
Aberystwyth.

December 1968.

WELSH-MEDIUM NURSERY EDUCATION IN 1968

FREQUENT references in the Welsh press in 1967 to the growth and alleged success of voluntary Welsh-medium nursery schools prompted the Faculty of Education of the University College of Wales to undertake a survey of *Ysgolion Meithrin Cymraeg*, as they are generally known. The information presented on these pages was collected by means of questionnaires, personal interviews and visits to a sample of schools to collect information about premises, equipment and activities. Recordings were taped and photographs taken. Teachers, parents, pupils and former pupils were interviewed in relation to a sample of schools extending from Caergybi (Holyhead) to Caerdydd (Cardiff).

The original intention was to survey the voluntary Welsh-medium nursery schools, *Yr Ysgolion Meithrin Cymraeg*, only, but it was soon discovered that similar educational experience was being provided in some areas by local education authorities. It therefore became possible to include some maintained classes in the survey for comparative purposes. The number of voluntary Welsh-medium schools discovered and functioning in a manner that enabled information about them to be collected in the Spring of 1968 amounted to 77. In at least 12 other places a voluntary *Ysgol Feithrin Gymraeg* had been in existence at a former date but forced to close because of difficulties of finance, teaching resources or accommodation. There were no known examples of schools having to close because of a lack of pupils. In 12 other places promoters of Welsh-medium nursery education had been trying to establish a voluntary *Ysgol Feithrin Gymraeg* but had failed to do so, usually because of failure to find suitable accommodation. Questionnaires were distributed to the 77 voluntary *Ysgolion Meithrin Cymraeg* known to be open and also to 31 local authority schools containing a Welsh-medium class for pupils under the age of five. Forty-nine completed questionnaires were returned from voluntary schools before the last date stipulated for their return. Two of these were in England. Sixteen questionnaires were returned from local-authority-maintained schools. Information given on questionnaires returned after the stipulated date could not be included in the analysis of data collected.

GROWTH OF THE VOLUNTARY MOVEMENT

THE Welsh-medium nursery school movement really began in 1951 with the establishment of three schools, Barry with eight pupils, Cardiff with fifteen and Neath with six. Welsh-medium play groups established before that date should be regarded as foundation play groups for an *Ysgol Gymraeg* rather than as *Ysgolion Meithrin Cymraeg*. The movement made little progress during the next ten years,

but by the early nineteen sixties the success of the earliest schools in turning pupils from English-speaking homes into bilinguals and in "feeding" *Ysgolion Cymraeg* was obvious. Seven new schools were established in 1964 and the movement reached its peak in 1967 when sixteen new schools were established. The survey had to be completed before it was possible to know how many schools would be established in 1968. Cronfa Glyndŵr, a trust fund established to foster the growth of Welsh-medium education in 1963, gave much needed financial support to the promoters of many schools in 1966-67. There was a growth in the number of pupils attending schools already established as well as in the number of schools during these years. The total number of pupils attending the Welsh-medium nursery schools that returned a questionnaire amounted to 860 in 1968 and a *majority of them were from homes in which no Welsh was spoken between parent and child.*

The table below indicates the distribution of schools at the time:

County	*Number of Schools*	*Number of Pupils*
(*Schools in England excluded*)		
Anglesey	7	135
Caernarvonshire	4	66
Denbighshire	6	96
Montgomeryshire	3	57
Cardiganshire	3	42
Pembrokeshire	1	23
Carmarthenshire	5	103
Glamorgan	18	338
Totals	47	860

The provision of Welsh-medium nursery classes by the local education authority in Flintshire meant that there was no need for voluntary *Ysgolion Meithrin Cymraeg* in that county. Questionnaires were returned from one *Ysgol Feithrin Gymraeg* in Merioneth, one in Breconshire and two in Monmouthshire after the analysis of data had begun and it was also known that there was one Welsh-medium playgroup in Radnorshire.

Problems of Accommodation

Finding suitable accommodation was a major problem for the promoters of Welsh-medium nursery education in 1968. Twenty-seven of the 49 schools were held in chapel vestries or church halls, most of them dismal places, but meeting the requirements of the public health authorities. Churches have played a prominent part in

supplying meeting places for voluntary Welsh-medium nursery education but the accommodation offered left much to be desired. In many instances there were irksome regulations about putting everything out of sight when the school was not in session, lack of storage space for equipment, etc., which must have been a sore trial for teachers working under such conditions. There was one example of toys and teaching aids presented to the school by parents and friends being sold in error at a jumble sale held in the chapel vestry on a Saturday. In some schools the seating accommodation and tables were very unsuitable for the young pupils. A few schools had been able to borrow furniture from the local education authority. In others suitable furniture had been bought as a result of a series of fund-raising activities by the promoters of the schools, parents and teachers.

This statement of the financial position of a Glamorgan school at the end of the first term may be regarded as fairly typical.

Expenses:

	£	s.	d.
Furniture and equipment	90	7	6
Rent, heat and light	35	0	0
Honoraria (for teaching and cleaning) ...	117	0	0
Total	£242	7	6

Income:

	£	s.	d.
Fees paid by parents	73	0	0
Collection and letter of appeal for support	95	15	0
Total	£168	15	0
Debt at end of first term	£73	12	6

This school was kept open with the aid of a grant from the Glyndŵr Trust and a series of jumble sales and coffee mornings arranged by parents and " friends " of the school.

Opening Hours

No voluntary school was able to offer what could be regarded as a full school week of nursery school experience. School hours varied from four hours per week to twelve.

In many schools there had been a significant increase both in the number of pupils and in the hours of opening between the day on which the school first opened and the time when the survey was

made. Some schools had opened with a Saturday morning session only and with five or six pupils. Others had opened originally on two mornings per week for two hours and had expanded to be open every morning by 1968, often with a waiting list for admission. In two schools, arrangements had been made to meet the growing demand by admitting different pupils on different days or at different times of day.

It was obvious that local authority-maintained classes had significant advantages over the voluntary schools in that they were open for more hours per week, in addition to having more suitable accommodation and better facilities for play activities, including out-door play, and, in many examples, a better supply of equipment and teaching aids.

The Teachers

The movement was heavily dependent on the good will of persons who believed in the value of Welsh-medium nursery education as a means of preserving and developing competence in the Welsh language among the young children of Wales. The normal practice was to have a 'headmistress' or two 'headmistresses' working on alternate days or weeks, assisted by a team of 'helpers'. She normally received a small honorarium, rarely exceeding £1 per day, and her 'helpers', who came to help in rotation, rarely received any financial recognition for their services. Fifty-three of the total of 60 'headmistresses'* referred to on the completed questionnaires had been trained for teaching and the same applied to 73 of the 176 'helpers' listed. Others described on the questionnaires as "housewives" may also have been trained teachers. Ten trained nurses were also acting as "teachers" or helpers. Headmistresses and helpers varied in age and experience from the numerous young married women in their twenties, some of whom had children attending the same school, to the late Miss Margaret Rosser who became founder-headmistress of a very successful *ysgol feithrin* in her home village many years after she had retired from her post as headmistress of a school in Glamorgan.

Some mothers who had no experience of teaching also helped at times of opening or dismissal or milk distribution. Others expressed their good will towards the schools by presenting toys or making simple teaching aids. Still more helped to raise funds by organising and supporting social functions in support of the schools. The result of the survey indicated that at least a thousand women in Wales had given service or some financial support to the *Ysgolion Meithrin Cymraeg* movement in 1968.

* Some of the forty-nine "schools" had more than one "headmistress" giving services on alternate days or alternate weeks.

Social Background

An analysis of the social class of the officers of *Ysgol Feithrin* Committees and of the occupations of parents of pupils indicated that the movement was to a very considerable extent associated with the upper classes in the Welsh social structure. There appeared to be a tendency for more working class pupils to be drawn in after a school had been firmly established and had consolidated its position as a starting point for entering a Welsh-medium school, *Ysgol Gymraeg*, with a good local reputation. Such pupils also tended to come from homes with a middle class outlook, religious affiliations and educational ambitions.

More than a third of the officers of the committees responsible for running the forty-nine schools were teachers. There were also ten doctors among them, three nurses and ten ministers of religion. The home background of the pupils, as indicated on the completed questionnaires against a simple social classification, were as follows:

Professional Class	318
Middle Class	267
Working Class	134

A similar analysis of the home background of pupils attending local authority maintained Welsh-medium nursery classes indicated a very different pattern of social background, as follows:

Professional Class	54
Middle Class	181
Working Class	361

Measure of Success in Relation to Aim

An analysis of the aims of the *Ysgol Feithrin Gymraeg* as indicated on completed questionnaires, the minute books of committees, press reports and correspondence between the promoters of schools and the officers of the Glyndŵr Trust, indicated, without a shadow of doubt, that the main motivating force behind the movement from the earliest stages and continuing into 1968 was a desire to preserve the Welsh language and to enrich the lives of as many as possible of the children of Wales by giving them command of the national language and self-confidence in their Welshness.

Nevertheless, there were some variations in the purpose of an *Ysgol Feithrin Gymraeg* arising from location. In some areas, emphasis was placed on providing opportunities for children with Welsh as a first language to meet in a natural social situation where they could converse, play and enjoy life through the medium of Welsh, something they could not do in the area in which they lived because other children they might happen to meet in street or park spoke English only.

In other areas the main purpose of an *Ysgol Feithrin Gymraeg* was to provide an opportunity for children from English-speaking homes to become bilingual at the age at which language learning appears to be natural and capable of being achieved with little conscious effort on the part of the learner.

In some schools there was evidence of conflict between these two aims, Welsh-speaking parents were inclined to press for a low intake of non-Welsh-speakers because their presence would inevitably be an anglicising influence undermining the use of Welsh as the sole medium of group life. This dilemma was not present where all pupils had a similar home linguistic background, the small group of schools in which every pupil had at least one Welsh-speaking parent and the larger group of schools in East Glamorgan and Monmouthshire where very few of the pupils had any contact with the Welsh language outside the school.

The " teachers " in general had no definite scheme of work and appeared to be deciding instinctively, almost on the spur of the moment, what vocabulary and sentence patterns should be presented through activity, movement, song or story. Teachers of Welsh at this stage in a child's development have not yet got anything resembling the scheme that was seen at a school in Dublin with the specific aim of turning young monolingual English speakers into speakers of Irish.

As language-learning cannot take place in a vacuum, the young learners were getting a good measure of the ordinary benefits of a nursery education in addition to acquiring command of the Welsh language. This was particularly true of local-authority-maintained nursery classes which had the same basic aim but had the advantage of a longer school day, better equipment, a full-time teacher trained to teach the very young and adequate facilities for indoor and outdoor group activities.

A sample of case studies indicated that the *Ysgolion Meithrin Cymraeg* and the *Ysgolion Cymraeg* to which their pupils almost invariably proceeded have been eminently successful in promoting educational progress, but it would not be appropriate to give credit for their success to the bilingual policy of such schools, nor to the teachers who work on them, without further investigation. It must be noted that the pupils of *Ysgolion Meithrin Cymraeg* and *Ysgolion Cymraeg* appear to have an unusually high percentage of homes that can be regarded as favourable, if not stimulating, to educational progress. The home almost invariably supports the school, often to the extent of buying Welsh books and bearing considerable transport costs in order to send the child to an *Ysgol Gymraeg* even when neither parent has any knowledge of Welsh and may even not be of Welsh origin.

Ample evidence was forthcoming from case studies and tape recordings made at schools to support views expressed by promoters

of the schools and the teachers who work in them that pupils are becoming bilingual at this age without much conscious effort, ranging from the child of English parents who was heard talking to himself in Welsh within a few weeks of coming to live in Wales and being sent to an *Ysgol Feithrin*, to the girl who was heard to say at the end of her first week at an *Ysgol Feithrin*, " I can't speak Welsh and I don't want to speak it ", but who spoke Welsh almost as naturally as her mother tongue within three months, proceeded to an *Ysgol Gymraeg* and in due course gained a scholarship to one of the older English universities.

Three examples of recordings made during the survey will suffice to indicate the nature of the progress made by young learners of Welsh from English-speaking homes in the *Ysgolion Feithrin - Ysgol Gymraeg* situation. Words spoken by the teacher are in *italics*.

(a) AT THE AGE OF FOUR:

Ble buoch chi Dydd Sadwrn? Yn Barri.
Fuoch chi Susan yn Barri hefyd? Ie.
Fuest ti yn Barri hefyd? Na, yn Tenby.
Fuest ti yn y môr? Ie.
Môr mawr oedd e? Ie.
Fuest ti yn y cwch? Na.
Fuodd rhywun arall mewn cwch yn y Barri? Fi wedi bod.
Cwch mawr oedd e? Ie.
Beth arall ych chi'n neud yn y Barri? Mynd ar y ceffyl a pan oedd fi ar y ceffyl fi wedi gweld Mrs Slay.
Wel, wel, oedd hi'n codi llaw arnat ti? Ie.
Fuest ti yn y cert? Na, dim yn y Barri, yn Butlins.

This recording was taken soon after a group of pupils, mainly with working class background, had entered an *Ysgol Gymraeg* after attending a voluntary *Ysgol Feithrin* for not less than one term and not more than a full school year. In the words of the headteacher of the school, Welsh had been " sinking in " at the nursery school stage. The young learners had come to respond and to understand but their active command of the language was still limited in comparison with that of a child speaking Welsh as a first language. They responded, as far as possible, with one word answers and they tended to be confused by the failure of the Welsh " Ie " to correspond to the English " Yes " at all times.

(b) AT THE AGE OF FIVE:

Ydych chi'n mynd i ddangos i Mrs Roberts nawr sut mae siarad Cymraeg? Pwy fuodd yn y sŵ wythnos ddwetha?
Fuest ti yn y sŵ wythnos ddwetha? Na.
Fuest ti? Do.

Beth welest ti? Llew.
Sawl llew oedd 'na? Un.
Beth arall oedd 'na? Parrot.
Oedd rhywbeth i'w fwyta yn y sŵ? Oedd.
Oedd rhywbeth i'w yfed? Oedd.
Beth y'n ni'n wneud yn yr ysgol? Syms.
Beth arall? Tynnu llun.
Tynnu llun beth? Tynnu llun tŷ.
Dwed wrth Mrs Roberts be sy gyda Mami. Babi.
Beth yw enw'r babi? Ddim yn gwybod.

In this sample the responses were quicker. There was a wider range of vocabulary and the learners were approaching natural language competence in their second language.

(c) AT THE AGE OF SIX:

Beth yw hwn sy fan hyn? Gwellt.
O ble ŷn ni'n cael gwellt? O fferm.
Ie. Pryd mae'r ffermwr yn torri gwellt a gwair? Yn yr haf. Fi wedi gweld ffermwr yn torri gwair.
Beth mae'r ffermwr yn wneud pan fydd e wedi torri'r gwair? (Dim ateb).
Mae e'n ei roi e mewn pecynnau bach neis, on'd yw e?
Mae e'n ei roi e tu ôl i'r tractor wedyn ac yn ...yna ag e i'r fferm. A beth mae e'n wneud ag e wedyn? (Dim ateb).
Beth sy'n bwyta'r gwair? Ceffyl.
A beth arall? Buwch.
Ie, mae'r gwartheg hefyd yn bwyta'r gwair. Mae'n rhaid i'r gwartheg gael bwyd, run fath â ni. A beth mae'r fuwch yn roi i ni? Llaeth.
A beth ŷn ni'n wneud â'r llaeth? Rhoi e yn y te a cael llaeth pan fo ni'n fach.
Ble byddwch chi'n mynd am wyliau, Ceinwen? I Weston.
Weston-super-Mare. Ble y'ch chi'n mynd, Christopher? I Butlins.
Pwllheli? Na.
Ble te? Ddim yn gwbod.
A ble byddi di'n mynd? Gweld Mamgu.
A ble mae Mamgu yn byw? Yn Rhymni.
Pwy sy'n mynd gyda ti? Dim ond fi.
Ble mae Mami a Dadi'n mynd? Dydy nhw ddim yn mynd.

Welsh was now being used as a natural medium of teaching in this school in an English-speaking area in more or less the same way as English has been used as a medium of teaching in Welsh-speaking areas for more than a century. The language was used in a natural

situation for teaching certain subjects. English was used for teaching other subjects and the pupils, at the age of six, had, in effect, acquired two vernaculars. The teacher used longer sentences and pupils were also capable of responding naturally, varying sentence-length according to need.

CONCLUSIONS

THE main conclusions of the survey appear to be:

1. The voluntary Welsh-medium nursery schools have made an important contribution in that they have shown that young learners can become bilingual within a few months without any apparent handicap to general progress. This has been achieved in spite of many difficulties and very inadequate resources. The attainments of former pupils of the schools appear to be above average but this may be due to home background rather than to the stimulation of early bilingualism. The actual effect of bilingualism, if any, could not be measured with the resources available.

2. There is an element of social injustice in the provision of opportunities to become bilingual by this method at present because the voluntary nursery school movement is essentially a middle-class movement. (This statement may well be equally valid in relation to English-medium play groups in Wales.)

3. The difficulties facing the voluntary Welsh-medium nursery schools are so numerous and severe that it is unlikely that the movement behind them can make much further progress. The results of the survey, and in particular the differences noted between the voluntary schools and the maintained nursery classes, suggest that the time has come for the incorporation of Welsh-medium nursery education in the maintained system of education as a special provision for a bilingual situation in Wales, even if there are insurmountable economic difficulties preventing the development of nursery education in general throughout the United Kingdom.

LIST OF PAMPHLETS

Published by the Collegiate Faculty of Education, edited by the Dean of the Faculty, Professor Jac L. Williams.

Pamphlet No. 1 (1953). Price 1/-.
A Review of Problems for Research into Bilingualism and Allied Topics.

Pamphlet No. 2 (1954). Price 1/.
A Welsh Linguistic Background Scale.

Pamphlet No. 3 (1954). Price 3/- (Reprinted 1963).
The Construction and Use of Standardised Tests of Intelligence and Attainment with special reference to the problems of a mixed language area.

Pamphlet No. 4 (1957). Price 1/-.
Bilingualism and Non-Verbal Intelligence: A Study of Test Results.

Pamphlet No. 5 (1957). Price 1/-.
A Welsh Word Recognition Test.

Pamphlet No. 6 (1958). Price 6d.
The Sixth Form Education of Training College Applicants.

Pamphlet No. 7 (1960). Price 4/6.
Bilingualism: A Bibliography with special reference to Wales.

Pamphlet No. 8 (1961). Price 1/6.
The Presentation of Welsh as a Second Language.

Pamphlet No. 9 (1962). Price 3/- (Reprinted 1963).
The Bilingual Method.

Pamphlet No. 10 (1962). Price 4/6.
Graddio Geirfa.

Pamphlet No. 11 (1962). Price 4/6.
Dysgu Cymraeg fel Ail Iaith — Llyfryddiaeth.
Teaching Welsh as a Second Language — Bibliography.

Pamphlet No. 12 (1963). Price 2/6.
Oral Examinations.

Pamphlet No. 13 (1965). Price 2/6.
Adults Learning Welsh: A Study in Motivation.

Pamphlet No. 14 (1966). Price 5/-.
Foreign and Second Language Learning in the Primary School.

Pamphlet No. 15 (1967). Price 2/6.
English Literature in the Schools of Wales.

Pamphlet No. 16 (1969). Price 2/6.
Welsh-medium Nursery Schools — 1968 — A Survey.

The Faculty also publishes an annual Bulletin in February of each year, containing news and articles relevant to the activities of the Faculty.

Copies may be obtained from: The Dean, Faculty of Education, University College of Wales, Cambrian Street, Aberystwyth.